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Fort Sumter: April 12, 1861

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Fort Sumter National Monument
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Director.

UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

Fort Sumter National Monument
Chamber of Commerce Building
50 Broad Street
Charleston, South Carolina

February 23, 1950

Memorandum

To: Regional Director

From: Historian

Subject: Reports on Fort Sumter, 1860 and 1861

A "second look" at the Historian's initial research reports on Fort Sumter, December 26, 1860 and April 12, 1861, indicates that there are a few minor errors therein which should be corrected; also, a few things which should be clarified.

1860 Report:

(1) (page 5, line 1) Sentence reading "Traverse circles had been laid on both faces . . ." This was intended to mean on the first tier only; thus "first tier," should be included after "both faces,". It follows that the "concrete foundations" referred to in line 7 pertain only to the first tier.

(2) (page 15, line 6). Likewise, sentence reading "Traverse circles (dimensions above) had been laid; . . ." Insert "(On first tier, and in one second-tier casemate)".

(3) (page 6, last three lines). Sentence reading "All first tier embrasures had been provided with double 6" wooden shutters, one on the outside, and one fitting close to the inside of the throat, both linked together." Closer examination of letter, Lieuts. Seymour and Snyder to Major Anderson, 24 March, 1861, in Volume I, Series I, Official Records, Army; pp. 213-5, convinces Historian that the "double shutter" arrangement was adopted for "guns for instant service" between December, 1860 and April, 1861, and that the original arrangement for all 41 embrasures of the first casemate tier was single 6" wooden shutters "secured with a wooden brace and rope lashing." These were probably placed next the throats of the embrasure on the outside. More exact information is not available.

(4) (First floor plan, Gorge). To the left of the Sally-port passageway the three kitchens (which are, of course, duplicated on the right side of the Gorge), indicated as 18' wide

should be 17' wide, as drawn. Likewise, the guardroom and kitchen immediately to the right of the sally-port passageway. The vertical parlor dimension should be 19' 6" rather than 20'. These (revised) widths represent the distance between plastered lathings (airspace) rather than the distances between "naked" walls, which is the norm used in the "front" room dimensions, Gorge, as well as in barracks (unless otherwise marked). The piers between all these rooms, where indicated as 7', actually include 6" of lathing or airspace on each side, so that the masonry piers themselves actually are 6' wide. However, as drawn, the 7' dimension should stand.

The space at each side of the pier between the kitchen and parlor at the right of the left magazine, indicated as $2\frac{1}{2}'$, should actually be $1\frac{1}{2}'$, as drawn. Similarly, the space next the pier between that parlor and the kitchen at its right, marked 2', should be $1\frac{1}{2}'$, as drawn. Similarly, the space marked 2' next the pier next right of that one. The outer opening of the Sally-port should be 11' (estimated) instead of 10'. The Historian was misled in these figures by contradictory interior measurements, and lathing (airspace) partitions.

1861 Report:

- (1) (page two, line 13): "two 42-pounders" (Right Flank) should read "four 42-pounders." This was an error either of copying or typing and makes no difference in the total number of guns (60).
- (2) After "iron plate," on line 11, page 3, add: "The remaining 16 'instant service' guns had their embrasures closed by an inner 6-inch wood shutter fitting close to the throat, in addition to the outer (original) shutter; the two shutters were linked and tightened together by an iron key."
- (3) Footnote 4 reference to Official Records should read "215" rather than "225".

Frank Barnes
Historian

FORT SUMTER: April 12, 1861

Operations at Fort Sumter during the period December 26, 1860 - April 12, 1861 were primarily concerned with preparations for the expected attack. Thus, the Engineer, Captain J. G. Foster, wrote of the period immediately following the occupation: "The regular work was then stopped, and all the remaining force was at once put to work mounting guns . . . and otherwise preparing to meet and repulse any attack that the forces of the State might make upon us." A policy of "first things first" probably was dictated, in addition, by threatened shortages of construction material (a shortage which became an actuality long before April) and a dwindling labor force.¹

Accordingly, the barracks remained unfinished, the task of flagging the casemate floors was carried no further, and the eight-foot-square openings in the scarp of the second tier were closed with three feet of brick rather than shaped into gun embrasures. The small size of the garrison was an additional factor here; with a strength of but sixty-five men, the manning of another tier of guns was not feasible; the openings, meanwhile, must be closed. The brick-fill in twenty-seven of the openings

1. Official Records, I, 173, 5; Crawford, J. G., Genesis of the Civil War; (New York, 1867), p. 200; O. L. Spaulding, Jr., "The Bombardment of Fort Sumter, 1861", in Annual Report of the American Historical Association for 1915, I, 190

was backed by two feet of sand kept in place by a sheathing of boards or by barrels, in eight others by two feet of flagging-stones laid dry, in the remaining six by dry brick or piles of "finishing-stuff" and flooring boards.²

During the period 58 guns were mounted on the first casemate and barbette tiers of the fort; in addition, five more in the parade as mortars, and three more about the sally-port. Thus the armament of Fort Sumter at the time of the initial attack was 60, distributed as follows:³

First tier: Right flank, one 42-pounder, four 32-pounders; Left flank, five 32-pounders; Right face, three 42-pounders, Left face, ten 32-pounders; Gorge (angles), two 32-pounders.

Barbette tier: Right flank, one 10-inch columbiad, four 8-inch columbiads, two 42-pounders; Left flank, one 10-inch columbiad, two 8-inch columbiads, two 42-pounders; Right face, none; Left face, three 8-inch seacoast howitzers, one 32-pounder; Gorge, one 8-inch sea-coast howitzer, two 32-pounders, six 24-pounders.

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2. Official Records, I, 214. Nowhere are there statements to be found that the barracks were "finished", or that the individual details of that "finish" were completed; similarly, the casemate flagging. While this is but negative proof, it is believed quite valid, in view of the numerous (and time-consuming) "defensive" arrangements that were completed in this period, and the statement "regular work was then stopped." In the instances of casemate flagging, there is positive information that the flagging was put to other uses.
3. Official Records, I, 18-19. This seems to be the final, and therefore most accurate tabulation of Fort Sumter armament as of April 22, 1861, (even more accurate than the arrangement shown in sketch on page 225). It should be noted that at the top of page 19, Capt. Foster's report shows an error in addition. Thus, he claims, 21 guns in casemate tier, making a total of 42 in both tiers, but when the guns listed in casemate tier are added, they come to a total of 25, thus making a two-tier total of 52. Fourteen guns had been mounted (permanently) prior to occupation of the fort in December 26, 1860 (see 1860 Report).

Parade-ground: one 10" columbiad, near the right shoulder angle, four 8" columbiads below the Salient and roughly on a line with the shoulder angles.

Sally-port: Three 8" Howitzers (see below).

* Not all of those guns on the first tier were "immediately available"; nine of the embrasures behind which guns were mounted, were closed (in addition to the outer shutter) either by stone flagging, notched to fit the throat and laid flat, or by bricks laid in mortar, as indicated in the "final" plan of March 27, 1861. Two of those first tier guns ready for "instant service" were closed by iron shutters (rather than wood) of $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch iron plate.⁴ In several instances special steps were taken to increase the coverage of the guns mounted. Thus, the parapet at the left gorge angle was cut away so that the 24-pounder mounted at that point could depress 18 degrees, sufficient for firing on the end of the wharf. On the first tier, the scarp wall between the pan-coupe of the right gorge angle and the embrasure of the next casemate north (marked X on the first-floor plan 1860) was cut away so as to allow the 32-pounder mounted in that casemate to bear upon Cummings Point; similarly, the wall at the other side of the pan-coupe (west), to allow the 32-pounder in the casemate adjacent (west) to bear upon at least a portion of the point (marked Y on first-floor plan, 1860).⁵

Special defensive preparations made during the period:

(1) "Machicouli" galleries of $1\frac{1}{2}$ " plank (five lined with $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch iron plate) placed on parapet, one at the center of each face and flank, and three

4. Official Records, I, 19, 245; for picture of manner of closing embrasure, see Crawford, op cit, 136.

5. Official Records, I, 19.

on the gorge "over and commanding the main postern." These projected three or four feet from the parapet, were prepared for musketry, and had trap-doors for the dropping of shells on an assaulting force.⁶

(2) "Thunder-barrels" containing fragments of rock in which a loaded shell was embedded, were placed at intervals along the parapets, near the Machicouli galleries, for use in case of assault. Similarly, fragments of brick and stone suitable as missiles, and 225 shells, mostly 8-inch, to be used as grenades. 23 (emergency) flights of wooden steps from terreplein to top of parapet were constructed.⁷

(3) Large traverse, consisting of a double curb of boards and scantling filled with earth hoisted from the parade, erected at right shoulder angle to protect guns of right flank from Sullivan's Island batteries. This was strengthened by sand-bags at top and sides and braced in the rear by extra gun carriages.⁸

(4) Stone and brick wall laid in cement built against the outer main gate to within four feet of the lintel. It was three feet six inches thick and six feet high; through it was a manhole one foot eleven inches wide. Looking through that manhole was an 8-inch seacoast howitzer mounted inside on a casemate carriage. One leaf of the two-part wooden gate was firmly bolted shut; the other could be either opened or securely shut, and

6. Official Records, I, 214; Spaulding, O. L., Jr., "The Bombardment of Fort Sumter 1861," in Annual Report of the American Historical Association for the Year 1912, I, 190; Abner Doubleday in his Reminiscences of Fort Sumter and Moultrie (New York, 1876), p. 87, says these galleries were also run out over the angles of the work. For picture of galleries projecting over gorge, see Photographic History, II, 41 and Gilmore, Engineer and Artillery Operations, plates between pp. 64-65.

7. Official Records, I, 214-5; Crawford, S. G., Genesis of the Civil War, p. 154.

8. Official Records, I, 16-17; Spaulding, op cit.

through it and corresponding with the manhole in the wall was a manhole closed by a door. The outside of the gate and the inside of the small door were covered with $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch iron plate. On the esplanade, at each side of the main gate, two 8-inch howitzers were mounted so as to sweep the gorge and the approaches to it.⁹

(5) Doors of the two postern gates in the gorge angles strengthened by three-foot brick walls laid in mortar, on the outside.¹⁰

(6) Two "fougasses" of 12 feet diameter, charged with 50 pounds of powder, were placed against the foot of the scarp, one in the centre of each half of the gorge. 8-foot high wooden fence erected at each end of esplanade, extending from scarp to low water.¹¹

(7) Walls of the officers' quarters, 1st and 2nd floors, were cut through "so as to admit a free communication through them . . . from one flank to the other."¹² There are no exact references to be found as to just where these openings were made or their appearance when completed. Presumably, the innermost wall of the innermost storeroom on each end, both floors, was the wall affected in each case, since an exit from the outer storeroom to the flank in each instance already existed, and likewise communication between the two storerooms. It seems most probable

9. Official Records, I, 215-6 (this also has a sketch); see also, sketches in Harper's Illustrated Weekly, V, 60, 101 (copies in possession of Fort Sumter National Monument).

10. Official Records, I, 215.

11. ibid.

12. Official Records, I, 17

that the wall between the end magazines and the adjoining flanks was not disturbed for this purpose.

(8) Two rooms (divided by hallway and staircase) on the parade-side of the innermost ("in" from the western end) kitchens on the western (left) half of the gorge (and to the immediate left of the sally-port passageway) were prepared as a hospital and a "splinter-proof traverse" of sand and brick with stone revetment was erected immediately outside on the parade-ground.¹³

(9) Two rooms (divided by hallway and staircase) to the immediate right of the western (left) storerooms on the gorge were prepared as "ordnance rooms," presumably storerooms additional to those already available. Another "splinter-proof traverse" was erected on the parade as protection for the ordnance rooms and storerooms adjacent.¹⁴

(10) Three splinter-proof shelters erected on right flank barbette tier. These shelters were formed of the timbers of (extra) gun carriages inclined against "the interior slope" (evidently of the parapet) and covered with two-inch embrasure iron securely spiked down.¹⁵

(11) Parade was cleared of temporary buildings and flagstones, and the latter were mounted endwise against the sides of the barracks and in the ends of the lower casemates on the two faces. The lantern from the light-house was mounted on wooden trestles in the middle of the parade-ground, and

13. Drawer 86, Sheet 82 (reproduced in Official Records, I, 215); Official Records, I, 215; for picture of traverses, see Photographic History, IX, 43.

14. Drawer 86, Sheet 82 (reproduced in Official Records, I, 225); Official Records, I, 217; Photographic History, IX, 43.

15. Official Records, I, 17.

north and east of this structure were two shell-bins. Just to the left (west) of the lighthouse lantern were thirteen 32-pounders mounted on skids. "Splinter-proof traverses" were constructed about the Columbiads mounted in the parade as mortars.¹⁶

(12) The gorge windows and doors were protected as follows: In the 2nd story, the 34 windows and six magazine ventilators, with two wrought-iron embrasure jams, eight inches thick and $3\frac{1}{2}$ feet long, permitting of musket fire over them; in the first story, the seven doors, with five-inch wooden shutters against which, outside, were built 9-inch brick walls laid in cement, outside this a pintle stone - $8' \times 2' 2" \times 1' 3"$ - with pieces of flagging fastened in with wooden wedges and melted lead; the six magazine ventilators, by large stones and lead against the wall and shutter; the fifteen windows, by pintle stones and flagging, fastened with wedges and lead. In all these openings, the filling was placed against the offset at the throat, by which a solid wall 2' thick and well secured in the rear was obtained.¹⁷

(13) One embrasure on the left flank, first tier, was enlarged, to permit the entrance of barrels from supply ships.¹⁸ Which embrasure, and exactly how, are unsolved questions.

16. Drawer 66, Sheet 82 (Official Records, I, 225); Photographic History, 40-43. Official Records, I, 215.

17. Official Records, I, 216; for photos, see Photographic History, IX, 43, also Gillmore, Engineer and Artillery Operations . . . , plates between pp 64-65.

18. Official Records, I, 17.

(14) The stone rip-rap at the foot of the casemate walls,
was removed to a depth of four or five feet more, to guard against
assault.¹⁹

19. Spaulding, O. L. Jr., op cit.

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